

TIME initiative tossed

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On Thursday supporters will go to Superior Court to show why the TIME initiative shouldn't be tossed off the November ballot.

Success or failure could mean the difference between an expanded light rail system in the Valley, the possibility of heavy rail linking Tucson and Phoenix, expanded public transit and freeway funding across the state.

It could also mean the difference for shoppers between paying around 8.5 cents in sales taxes on every dollar spent and 9.5 cents.

TIME, which stands for Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy, if approved by voters, would increase the state sales tax by one cent, raising \$42.6 billion over 30 years for transportation projects.

But Secretary of State Jan Brewer pulled the initiative Aug. 11 after determining that despite filing 106,000 extra signatures the initiative was short 15,000 valid signatures to qualify for the ballot.

Supporters, including David Martin, an Ahwatukee Foothills resident and co-chair of the initiative, said the campaign would go to court to show that many of the signatures were erroneously ruled invalid.

The issue is important because without a new funding source the Arizona Department of Transportation will run out of money for everything but basic maintenance in 10 to 15 years, with little or nothing left over for expansion to deal with Arizona's growing population, supporters said.

And assuming a draft environmental impact statement recommends construction, the TIME initiative could also help fund the South Mountain Loop 202, which the Maricopa Association of Governments considers a high priority project.

The freeway, originally budgeted at \$1.1 billion, is now up to \$1.7 billion and is expected to cost even more when up-to-date figures are released in the fall.

According to Tim Tait, a spokesman for ADOT, if it's recommended for construction the project will move ahead with or without the TIME Initiative on the ballot.

"The South Mountain Freeway will move ahead," he said. As to how the project will be paid for, Tait said there is money in Prop. 400, which was the half-cent sales tax hike Maricopa County voters approved in 2004, as well as other possibilities.

"Ultimately, it will be a MAG decision how to fund the project," Tait said.

Prospects for the TIME Initiative are unclear, even if it does get on the ballot.

In the past few years Phoenix voters have approved dedicated sales tax hikes for transportation (four 10ths of a cent), parks and preserves (one-10th of a cent) and to hire more police officers (two-10ths of a cent).